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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: UZBEK LOWER HOUSE ADOPTS INTERNATIONAL LABOR
ORGANIZATION CONVENTIONS ON CHILD LABOR

REF: TASHKENT 234

Classified By: Political Officer Rich Fitzmaurice for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

1. (C) Summary: On March 13, a state-controlled website reported that the lower house of Uzbekistan's Parliament adopted International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 138 (Minimum Age for Employment) and ILO Convention 182 (Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labor). In separate conversations with poloff, a local ILO representative and a MFA official both reported that the conventions would soon be adopted by the Senate and signed by President Karimov. The adoption of the ILO conventions followed an exchange of letters this year between the MFA and ILO, and occurred during a visit by a senior level ILO official. The ILO local representative said that the tone of that visit was "very positive," noting that parliamentarians had frank private discussions with the ILO officials. The local ILO representative also discussed ILO's continuing efforts to combat child labor, including conducting training for government officials, engaging in awareness raising activities, and promoting the use of work collectives as an alternative to child labor during the cotton harvest. While the true judge of the government's commitment to reform will be the degree to which it implements the ILO conventions on the ground, we believe that its adoption of the conventions still marks a significant step forward for the government, as well as a clear victory for ILO, which has carefully engaged the government on child labor issues for several years. Post believes ILO has done excellent work in Uzbekistan and supports restoration of Department of Labor funding for its child labor programs in FY 2009. End summary.

ILO CONVENTIONS ADOPTED BY LOWER HOUSE, FULL RATIFICATION
EXPECTED SOON

¶2. (U) On March 13, the state-controlled press-uz.info website reported that the lower house of Uzbekistan's Parliament adopted International Labor Office (ILO) Convention 138 (Minimum Age for Employment) and ILO Convention 182 (Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labor).

¶3. (C) On March 19, the story was confirmed by ILO local representative Svetlana Rakhimova, who added that her government contacts had informed her that the conventions would be adopted by the Senate in late March or early April and signed by President Karimov shortly afterwards. The story was also confirmed on March 14 by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of United Nations and International Organizations Head Durbek Amamov, who also reported that the conventions would be adopted by the Senate and signed into law by President Karimov soon. Rakhimova stated that once the Uzbek government formally ratifies the documents, it will take the ILO another ten to twelve months to formally recognize the ratifications. Nevertheless, during this time period, Rakhimova said that ILO would continue to work with the government on adopting the necessary reforms to bring Uzbekistan in compliance with the conventions.

ADOPTION FOLLOWS EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BETWEEN MFA AND ILO

¶4. (C) The adoption by Parliament's lower house of the ILO conventions follows shortly after an exchange of letters between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ILO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). On January 8, Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov sent a diplomatic note to the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) to ask for an assessment of whether Uzbekistan is in compliance with international standards on child labor and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Uzbekistan ratified in 1994. Both ILO and UNICEF responded to Norov's diplomatic note via letter. Responding for the ILO on January 18, ILO Subregional Office for Central and Eastern Europe Director Elaine Fultz noted that Uzbekistan had not ratified ILO conventions 138 and 182, and also had not provided reports in regard to other ILO conventions, namely 29 (Forced Labor) and 105 (Abolishment of Forced Labor), which it had ratified in the 1990s (ref A).

ILO OFFICIAL FOLLOWS UP LETTER WITH VISIT TO UZBEKISTAN

¶5. (C) Fultz followed up her letter with a visit to Uzbekistan on March 12 - 14. Rakhimova accompanied Fultz to all of her official meetings with government officials, and described the overall tone of the visit as "very positive." On March 12, Fultz visited the lower house of Parliament, where she had a frank discussion with several parliamentarians. While many government officials have been reluctant to even admit the existence of child labor in Uzbekistan, the parliamentarians recognized the problem in private discussions with Fultz. They noted that cotton was a critical cash crop for Uzbekistan, and admitted that students were used in certain areas of the country because a large amount of labor was needed to pick the cotton in a relatively short period of time. They also noted that increasing labor migration to neighboring countries was resulting in a labor shortage. However, the parliamentarians agreed that the solution to the problem was finding alternative sources of labor. During the visit, ILO also delivered copies of a book in Uzbek, "Putting an End to the Worst Forms of Child Labor," which was published jointly by ILO and the Interparliamentary Union. Enough copies were delivered for each member of Parliament. The lower house of Parliament adopted the ILO conventions the day after Fultz's visit.

¶6. (C) On March 14, Fultz met with the Interagency Working Group on Child Labor, which ILO helped launch in 2006 to pursue dialogue with the government on child labor issues. The working group currently includes UNICEF, the Cabinet of Ministers Social Complex, the Ministries of Labor, Health,

Public Education, Higher and Specialized Education, the National Human Rights Center, the Children's Fund, and trade unions. Rakhimova noted that one breakthrough from the March 14 meeting was that the Cabinet of Minister's main representative on the working group, Ms. Anarbaeva, declared that ratification of the ILO conventions would require the working group to develop new action points over the next month and half. Rakhimova said that she privately shared with Anarbaeva a copy of Kyrgyzstan's national action plan to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, and she expected that Anarbaeva would draw upon the Kyrgyz document to come up with further action points for Uzbekistan.

ILO FOCUSES ON PREVENTION OF CHILD LABOR

¶7. (C) As part of its regional International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC), ILO has focused its efforts on the prevention of child labor. ILO has continued to work with the interagency working group to implement an education campaign through Mahallas, a pre-Soviet system of community-based management and social provision, to publicize the dangers and eliminate hazardous conditions for minors. ILO is also working with social workers employed by the Mahallas to monitor the welfare and working conditions of children. Beforehand, the social workers were tasked with reducing the threat of religious extremism in their communities. ILO also continues to hold trainings with Ministry of Labor inspectors and Ministry of Education juvenile delinquent officers that focus on occupational safety and emphasize that children should not be involved in any labor activities potentially detrimental to their health. ILO also plans to work with a group of journalists at state-controlled media outlets to raise awareness about the worst forms of child labor.

CHILD LABOR AND LABOR MIGRATION: KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

¶8. (C) Rakhimova observed that the issue of labor migration goes hand in hand with the use of child labor in Uzbekistan. She noted that after independence, the privatization of farms in Uzbekistan left approximately 2 million people unemployed. Many of those individuals have migrated to neighboring countries, especially Kazakhstan and Russia, looking for seasonal work. ILO has thus promoted the use of "seasonal workforce cooperatives" during the cotton harvest as an alternative to child labor. The workforce cooperatives would be made up of paid laborers drawn from the unemployed, many of whom would otherwise seek employment abroad. The cooperatives would work throughout the year, and would be involved in harvesting, seeding, weeding, and the improvement of irrigation systems. ILO already has worked with the Association of Farmers (a quasi-governmental body) to organize cooperatives in certain regions of the country. They now aim to promote the use of cooperatives nationwide.

¶9. (C) Besides periodic labor shortages, Rakhimova noted that poverty was another factor behind the use of child labor in Uzbekistan. Many rural families, especially those in which the mother is unemployed and the husband has left the country permanently to work elsewhere, depend on the income earned by their children. For this reason, ILO has been working with the Women's Business Association (WBA), another quasi-governmental body, to promote entrepreneurship and income-generating activities among rural women. Rakhimova noted that the WBA had recently submitted a grant application to the World Bank to fund some of its activities.

COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

¶10. (C) ILO also has continued cooperation on awareness raising activities with the National Human Rights Center (a quasi-governmental body) and its director, ex-presidential candidate Akmal Saidov. The National Human Rights Center has recently published a book in Uzbek on the basic conventions

and recommendations of the ILO. Rakhimova also said that when Saidov recently visited ILO's headquarters in Vienna, one of its senior officers suggested that he translate into Russian a particular guide for child labor inspectors. Upon his return to Uzbekistan, Saidov tracked down an existing Russian translation of the guide, and is currently working on getting it published and distributed to child labor inspectors across Uzbekistan.

LOSS OF DEPARTMENT OF LABOR MONIES HAMPERS ILO ACTIVITIES

¶11. (C) Rakhimova observed that ILO's efforts in Uzbekistan were hampered by the loss this fiscal year of 2.5 million dollars in U.S. Department of Labor funds for the ILO-IPEC regional program. Rakhimova said that ILO continued to fund its activities by means of a one million euros grant from the German government, but noted that these funds were currently stretched quite thin.

ILO REFRAINS FROM ATTENDING COTTON MEETING IN BREMEN

¶12. (C) Rakhimova said that both ILO and UNICEF declined sending representatives to a conference promoted by the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) and hosted by the Bremen Cotton Exchange in Germany on April 2 - 5. Though the conference is mostly a forum for the international cotton industry, several human rights activists were invited to discuss the use of child labor in Uzbekistan's harvest, most likely the result of a lengthy petition human rights activists sent to the ICAC in 2007 alleging child labor abuses. For her part, Rakhimova argued that the government has taken significant steps lately on child labor, and she believed that continuing dialogue with the government would be more effective in lessening incidences of child labor in Uzbekistan than calling for a boycott of Uzbek cotton, as advocated by some human rights activists and reportedly implemented by some European retailers.

HUMAN RIGHTS ALLIANCE HOLDS MEETINGS ON CHILD LABOR DURING COTTON HARVEST

¶13. (C) On March 14, poloff attended a "roundtable" devoted to the use of child labor during the cotton harvest hosted by the Human Rights Alliance in Tashkent. Beside the presenters and a few other Alliance members, poloff was the lone attendee. The meeting revolved mostly around a presentation given by the "youth wing" of the Alliance, which consisted of two earnest but young college students, who mostly recycled previous accusations made by other human rights activists regarding the use of child labor during the annual cotton harvest. There appeared to be little new reporting or explanation of how their research was conducted. An Alliance meeting was devoted to the same subject on February 15, reportedly drawing 30 participants and covered by an independent website (Comment: Given poloff's experience at the second meeting, as well as the enormous drop-off in attendance between the two meetings, we have serious doubts about the quality of the first meeting as well. In addition, the meetings highlight that many of the accusations made by human rights activists regarding the use of child labor in Uzbekistan are questionable and unverifiable. On the other hand, poloff has found that the ILO is a much more dependable source of information regarding the true extent of child labor in the country. End comment.)

COMMENT

¶14. (C) While the imminent adoption of the ILO conventions is certainly a step forward for the government, the true test of its commitment to reform is the degree to which it implements the conventions on the ground. Nevertheless, adoption of the ILO conventions will mark an important victory for ILO, which has been pushing the government to adopt the conventions since 2005. We believe that ILO has demonstrated that steady

engagement with the government can eventually pay dividends, and is much more likely to be successful in limiting incidences of child labor in Uzbekistan than threats of boycott by human rights activists. We also believe that ILO continues to do excellent work in Uzbekistan, and we support restoring its Department of Labor funding for fiscal year [2009](#).

NORLAND